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SURPRISE: THE PRECURSOR TO SOVIET OPERATIONAL SUCCESS

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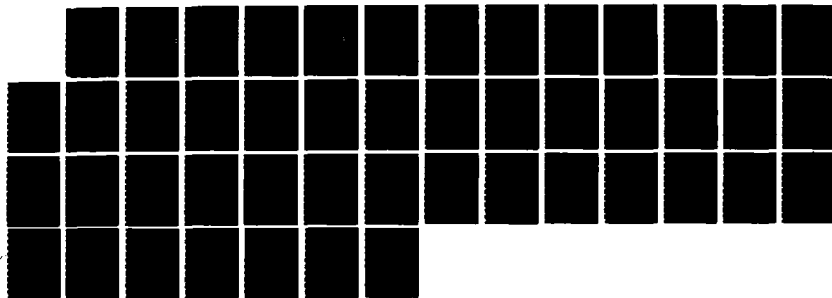
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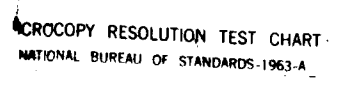
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SURPRISE: THE PRECURSOR TO SOVIET OPERATIONAL SUCCESS

by

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9 April 1986

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Lastly, the study suggests a full range of measures that can be implemented to reduce NATO's vulnerability to a short-warning, unreinforced attack in Central Europe. These include increasing the size of NATO's conventional forces in Central Europe; constructing permanently manned field fortifications along the IGB; and implementing a broad range of readiness initiatives.

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ABSTRACT

Surprise: The Precursor to Soviet Operational Success. by Major(P) Charles C. Campbell, United States Army, 39 pages.

→ This study examines the element of surprise within the context of operational warfare. Specifically, the study examines the degree to which surprise has emerged as the prevalent factor in the shaping of the Soviet Army's organization, force structure, and doctrine. The study also examines the implications that the Soviet emphasis on surprise has for the NATO defense of Central Europe. It includes an assessment as to the likelihood of a Soviet surprise attack and the NATO vulnerability to such an attack.

The study concludes that Soviet planners increasingly favor a short-warning, unreinforced attack that denies NATO the warning time that it requires to establish a viable, cohesive, and continuous forward defense. It further concludes that a strategy that provides for a surprise attack that offers the potential for strategic success in a single operational campaign is especially attractive to Soviet planners since it is grounded in historical experience, takes full advantage of Soviet military strengths and capabilities, and exploits NATO vulnerabilities.

Lastly, the study suggests a full range of measures that can be implemented to reduce NATO's vulnerability to a short-warning, unreinforced attack in Central Europe. These include increasing the size of NATO's conventional forces in Central Europe; constructing permanently manned field fortifications along the IGB; and implementing a broad range of readiness initiatives. →

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INTRODUCTION

In its cornerstone doctrinal manual, FM 100-5, Operations, the U. S. Army reintroduces the notion of the operational level of war. In FM 100-5 the operational art is defined as "the employment of military forces to attain strategic goals in a theater of operations through the design, organization, and conduct of campaigns and major operations."¹ Implicit within that definition is the notion that the operational level of war provides the linkage between strategic goals and actions at the tactical level. Further, that definition suggests that the successful prosecution of operational level warfare requires the effective and coordinated movement, sustainment and sequential employment of large formations in order to convert tactical successes to favorable strategic outcomes. The essence of the operational art lies in the design and direction of campaigns which set the terms by which large units will fight and what use they will make of tactical successes.

Though the notion of the operational level of war is enjoying a renaissance within the U. S. Army, the Soviet Army has long acknowledged the desirability of carrying out a related series of tactical actions in order to achieve strategic objectives. In fact, it is within the operational realm that the Soviet Army has traditionally excelled. The Soviet Army's ability to achieve successes at the operational level is inextricably linked to a concept of operational warfare that has evolved over decades. The Soviet concept for operational warfare finds its roots in the circumstances of the Russian Civil War. The concept was subsequently shaped, tempered, and refined by the monumental events of the "Great Patriotic War." And now, in the post-war era, the Soviet concept for operational warfare has come to full maturity. It is a concept that has been indelibly shaped by the dictates of strategy, an exhaustive study of World War II and a comprehensive analysis of the effects of

modern weapons on the nature of combat. Moreover, it has provided the framework for a warfighting doctrine that seeks to harmonize strategic objectives, operational plans, and tactical actions.

Fundamental to the Soviet concept of operational warfare is an overriding emphasis on the offensive as the only decisive and, for the Soviet Union, the only possible form of warfare. Of the principles that lie at the foundation of the Soviet concept for offensive warfare, surprise is arguably the foremost. In the Soviet view, surprise is the means by which initiative is seized and a strong, viable, and coherent defense in depth is preempted. Surprise is also viewed by the Soviets as a combat multiplier which has the potential to radically alter the correlation of forces. Further, according to Soviet doctrine, surprise obviates the need to mass large and vulnerable concentrations of forces, creates conditions conducive to rapid advance, lessens logistical problems by reducing the amount of serious fighting, reduces the likelihood of operational pauses or inactivity, and fosters the accelerated achievement of strategic objectives.²

In the prosecution of offensive warfare, the Soviets have long stressed that surprise is the most important principle of military art. In the Soviet view, the integrated nature of the modern battlefield, the proliferation of sophisticated and lethal weapon systems, and the presence of large mechanized and armored formations only serve to increase the significance that they attach to surprise as a combat multiplier. As a result, the Soviet Army has been organized, equipped and trained to be able to achieve and maximize the impact of surprise. Soviet efforts have, in recent years, focused on achieving a short-warning attack capability. Soviet interest in achieving such a capability becomes all the more frightening when one considers NATO's vulnerability to a

surprise attack. This vulnerability results from NATO's lack of operational depth, its commitment to the forward defense, the mal-positioning of in-theater forces, NATO's limited operational reserves and the lack of in-place strategic reserves.

The purpose of this study will be to examine the element of surprise within the context of operational warfare. Specifically, this study will examine the degree to which surprise has emerged as the prevalent factor in the shaping of the Soviet Army's organization, force structure, and doctrine. Further, and perhaps most importantly, the study will examine the implications that the Soviet emphasis on surprise has for the NATO defense of Central Europe. This examination will include an assessment as to the likelihood of a Soviet surprise attack in Central Europe and the degree to which NATO is vulnerable to such an attack. Concomitantly, the study will examine a full range of measures that can be implemented to reduce NATO's vulnerability to a surprise attack. Lastly, the study will conclude with an assessment of NATO's ability to conduct a defense against a surprise attack consistent with the political necessity of establishing a forward defense on the West German border, the military necessity of defeating attacking Warsaw Pact formations and the humanitarian necessity of minimizing damage to the civilian population.

THE NATURE OF SURPRISE

The fundamental consideration that governs the prosecution of war is the desire to achieve victory over an enemy with minimal losses to friendly forces and materiel. Over the years, military thinkers have come to recognize the vital role which surprise plays in the achievement of that objective.

The concept of surprise as a critical component of military success is a notion that has traditionally been embraced by Soviet military thinkers. The Soviets recognize surprise as a fundamental principle of war and emphasize that it is achieved by striking the enemy at a time or place, or in a manner, for which he is unprepared. They also acknowledge that there are many factors that contribute to surprise. These factors include speed, effective intelligence, variation in tactics, and operational security.³

A key component of the Soviet concept of surprise is deception. Deception, according to Soviet doctrine, encompasses a myriad of applications, including camouflage, disinformation, and imitation.⁴ The purpose of deception, in the Soviet view, is to minimize attrition by concealing the disposition and capabilities of friendly forces and by misrepresenting friendly intentions with regard to future military operations.⁵

The high regard that the Soviets attach to surprise arises in part from their study of historical battles in which other nations obtained decisive victories by the use of surprise. It is also linked to the Soviet experience in their own successful use of surprise against the Germans and Japanese in World War II and more recently in Czechoslovakia and Afghanistan. It is in the context of these experiences that the Soviet concept of surprise has come to full maturation. These experiences warrant examination, therefore, if the Soviet perspective on surprise is to be fully understood.

HISTORICAL PRECEDENTS

The Soviet concept for conducting modern operations is deeply rooted in the World War II experience of the Soviet armed forces. Their experiences in World

War II have led the leadership of the Soviet Army to reaffirm their traditional belief in the value of strategic, operational, tactical surprise.

It is noteworthy that the Soviets began the war the victims of the strategic surprise achieved by the Germans when they launched operation Barbarossa in June of 1941. Despite the fact that there were adequate indicators of a pending German invasion, Soviet political and military leaders either failed to recognize the significance of the indicators or chose not to act upon them. In any case, the momentum gained by the Germans as a result of having achieved strategic surprise enabled them to win dramatic victories and inflict catastrophic losses on the Soviets. That momentum carried the German attack hundreds of kilometers into the Russian heartland before the offensive striking power of the Wehrmacht spent itself on the determined defenses of Leningrad, Moscow, and Stalingrad.

The lesson was not lost on the Soviet Army. It soon became a Soviet "article of faith" that surprise was a prerequisite to success in war. Increasingly, the Soviet Army mastered the nuances of surprise, recognizing that it could be obtained by secrecy in preparation, deception in intent, and speed in execution. Largely as a result of the renewed awareness of the advantages of surprise, Soviet operational and tactical planners integrated provisions for deception, disinformation, demonstration, and camouflage into operational and tactical plans. As a result, the Soviets were able to achieve significant degrees of surprise on many occasions both in defensive operations, notably the Battle of Kursk, and in offensive operations, notably the Byelorussian, Jassy-Kishinev, and Vistula-Oder Campaigns. In fact, the campaigns, major operations, and battles of the Eastern Front constitute a veritable treasure

house of military examples where operational surprise contributed significantly to battlefield outcomes.

MANCHURIA

Soviet skills at achieving surprise reached what some commentators justifiably believe was their zenith in the prosecution of the Manchurian campaign against the Japanese in August of 1945. Because of imaginatively planned and boldly executed actions, the Soviets were able to achieve surprise at every level of war in what has been represented by David M. Glantz, the U. S. Army's most noted authority on Soviet operational art, as the preeminent Soviet military effort in World War II.⁶

Because of its scope, complexity, and unqualified success, the Manchurian offensive is studied extensively by the Soviets. The Soviets view the Manchurian campaign, according to Glantz, as a textbook case of how to begin war and quickly bring it to a successful conclusion.⁷ As such, an examination of the Manchurian campaign may prove instructive to the contemporary soldier faced with the possibility of Soviet-led Warsaw Pact aggression in Western Europe.

The Manchurian campaign was undertaken by the Soviets after four years of bitter and brutal conflict with Germany. As allied victory in Europe became imminent, the western powers increasingly pressured Joseph Stalin to commit forces against the Japanese. Desiring to establish the Soviet post-war position in the Far East, Stalin directed his military leaders to plan a campaign that would culminate in the Soviet occupation of Manchuria, Northern Korea, Southern Sakhalin Island, and the Kurile Islands.⁸

The Soviet plan for the conquest of Manchuria, though simple in concept, was grand in terms of both scope and expectations. The plan called for a

strategic double envelopment conducted by Soviet forces along three axes. The Trans-Baikel Front would attack eastward into western Manchuria, while the 1st Far Eastern Front would attack westward into eastern Manchuria. These two attacks were to converge in the Central Plain, the industrial and agricultural heartland of Manchuria. The 2d Far Eastern Front was to conduct a supporting attack into northern Manchuria in order to fix forces in the north and preclude their commitment against the main attacks in the east and west.⁹

The results of the campaign overwhelmingly attest to the comprehensiveness of the planning and the adroitness of the execution. Despite adverse terrain and determined Japanese resistance, Soviet forces were able in a period of nine days to penetrate from 500 to 950 kilometers into Manchuria, secure major population centers and force the Japanese Kwantung Army and its auxiliaries to surrender.¹⁰ In his thoughtful and meticulously researched study of the Manchurian campaign, August Storm: The Soviet 1945 Strategic Offensive in Manchuria, David M. Glantz contends that the campaign validated the experience that Soviet forces had gained in the war against Germany.¹¹ He further argues that in Manchuria, the Red Army successfully meshed advanced tactical and operational techniques with the requisite degree of bold and imaginative leadership.¹² The result was, as previously indicated, a victory of staggering proportions.

Glantz suggests that ultimate Soviet victory was inevitable because of the preponderance of Soviet forces, the crumbling Japanese strategic posture in the western Pacific and the weakened condition of the Kwantung Army.¹³ However, he contends that the magnitude of the victory and the rapidity with which it was obtained were the result of the Soviets having achieved a significant degree of strategic, operational, and tactical surprise. Surprise was achieved, according

to Glantz, because of the timing of the Soviet attack; the Soviet willingness to attack under adverse weather conditions; and the Soviet decision to attack across terrain considered unsuitable for large-scale operations.¹⁴

That the Soviets sought and achieved a considerable measure of surprise was dramatically confirmed by the rapidity with which the Japanese defenses were fractured and rendered ineffective. The secret deployments of large formations to the Far East contributed significantly to the achievement of strategic surprise. The Soviets ruthlessly implemented stringent security measures in order to mask the movement of men and materiel to the Far East. Moreover, they sought to enhance strategic surprise by limiting the dissemination of attack plans, relying on night movement, using remote assembly areas, and attacking from the march.

While the massiveness of Soviet movements made them impossible to conceal completely, clever and imaginative deception measures obscured the scale of the Soviet's deployments and caused the Japanese to underestimate the Soviet capability to attack.¹⁵ Most Kwantung Army intelligence agencies assessed that the Soviets would not conduct major operations until the fall of 1945, after the end of the rainy season.¹⁶ As a result, the Soviet attack in the second week of August caught the Japanese, with rare exceptions, completely by surprise.

The Soviet attack achieved not only complete strategic surprise, but also a significant degree of surprise at both the operational and tactical levels. The Soviet decision to attack with a two-front envelopment from both east and west achieved a considerable measure of operational surprise because it contradicted Japanese expectations and force deployments. Although the Japanese expected a limited-scale attack in the west, they believed that it would take the form of an advance through passes that were defended by Japanese forces occupying

well-prepared fortifications. They totally discounted the possibility of a major attack through the Grand Khingan Mountains, which they considered impassable.¹⁷ The Japanese also believed that the logistical problems associated with the movement and resupply of large formations in eastern Mongolia militated against large-scale Soviet deployments to that area. Further, they believed that if these problems were resolved, the problems associated with traversing large expanses of desert, obtaining adequate supplies of water, and crossing the considerable obstacle posed by the Grand Khingan Mountains precluded a large-scale attack from the west. The Japanese deployed accordingly, and as a result, concentrated the bulk of their combat forces in central and eastern Manchuria. Moreover, because of their belief that an attack from the west was extremely improbable, the Japanese made no contingency plans to divert combat forces from central or eastern Manchuria to the west in the event that it became necessary to concentrate forces there.

Soviet operational techniques also surprised and confused the Japanese. The Soviet predilection for bypassing fortified positions and the willingness of attacking Soviet formations to tolerate enemy concentrations in their rear were a source of confusion and frustration to Japanese commanders. Moreover, the Soviet practice of attacking on every possible axis of advance, as well as their predilection for attacking over terrain considered impassable by the Japanese, tended both to paralyze and to preempt Japanese defenses. The Japanese were also surprised by the unforeseen employment of tanks in the first echelon, either initially or shortly after the initiation of the attack. Not expecting to encounter tanks in such difficult terrain, Japanese defenders were poorly equipped to deal with the numbers and quality of tanks which they confronted.¹⁸

Tactically, the Soviets also were able to achieve a considerable measure of surprise. Soviet adeptness at using the firepower and maneuver of tanks and assault guns was unforeseen by the Japanese who expected Soviet tactics to be cumbersome, unsophisticated, and characterized by a reliance on mass attacks of infantry. Similarly, the Japanese were at a loss to counter the actions of Soviet forward detachments. These formations were consistently able to prevent the Japanese from establishing coherent defenses by bypassing resistance and striking deep to envelop Japanese forces.

Soviet emphasis on high-speed operations reinforced the effectiveness of maneuver and contributed to Japanese surprise at the operational and tactical levels. Fast moving forward detachments operated at every level with great effect. These formations, in the vivid description proffered by Glantz perpetuated the momentum of initial assaults, created a momentum of their own, and imparted that momentum to army and front operations as a whole.¹⁹

The Soviet experience in Manchuria has had lasting implications for Soviet organization, force structure, and doctrine. Much of what they learned in the prosecution of the Manchurian campaign can, according to the Soviets, be applied to contemporary situations. It is noteworthy that in the Soviet view, the conditions that faced the Soviet forces in Manchuria are in many respects analogous to the conditions that contemporary Soviet forces confront. Soviet planners in Manchuria were forced to grapple with the problem of determining how to attack and win quickly in the "beginning period of the war." This is essentially the problem that confronts contemporary Soviet planners. In developing a solution to this problem in Manchuria, the Soviets embraced the notion of a rapid advance to preempt defenses in depth and to secure rapidly strategically important objectives. Further, they saw the merit in planning and

executing the advance so as to maximize the impact of surprise. Additionally, they recognized the necessity to structure and organize their forces to achieve the requisite shock effect and speed. They also acknowledged the value of a doctrine that called for attacks on multiple axes, across a broad front, with the majority of forces well forward in the first echelon. In so doing they recognized the destructive effect of bringing maximum pressure to bear on an overextended enemy and fragmenting a defense before it could be properly established. In Manchuria, the Soviets also saw the value of employing armor-heavy forward detachments to create confusion, destroy the defensive equilibrium and carry the battle to the operational depth. By the bold and timely commitment of forward detachments, the Soviets sought to destroy the integrity of enemy defenses and preempt the timely and effective commitment of enemy operational reserves.

The operational methods and techniques described above were the legacy of the Manchurian campaign. Their subsequent application in whole or in part, have contributed to successes in the recent past in Czechoslovakia and Afghanistan and offer prospects for future success in Western Europe.

CZECHOSLOVAKIA

The Soviet occupation of Czechoslovakia in August of 1968 is a vivid example of the ability of the Soviet Union to achieve strategic and operational surprise in contemporary times. The Soviet Union, in complete secrecy, coordinated the actions of five national armies, completed a limited mobilization, and executed massive troop movements in preparation for the invasion and subsequent occupation of Czechoslovakia. The magnitude of the surprise achieved by the Soviet Union in the unexpected invasion of

Czechoslovakia was of such an order, that the Soviet Union was able within two days to present to the west the "fait accompli" of a Soviet occupied Czechoslovakia. Further, the speed with which the invasion was conducted virtually paralyzed the reformist government of Alexander Dubcek and preempted any effective action by a well-armed and well-equipped Czechoslovak Army.

Operationally, the invasion was characterized by the imaginative employment of airborne forces in combination with a rapid advance of mechanized forces across a broad front. Within hours of the invasion, airlifted troops in division strength had, in a classic "coup de main," completely secured Prague, its airport, and all the entrances to the city.²⁰ Within two days Prague was occupied and surrounded by 100,000 troops and 2,000 tanks as advancing armored columns from five Warsaw Pact nations closed-in and invested the city. The ground invasion, like the airborne action that preceded it, was imaginatively conceived and boldly executed. Armored columns consisting of Soviet, East German, Polish, Hungarian, and Bulgarian formations advanced into Czechoslovakia along eighteen principle axes from the north, northwest, south, and east. So rapid was their advance that effective action by a Czechoslovak Army consisting of four armored divisions and ten motorized rifle divisions was preempted even though the initial Warsaw Pact invasion force reached a strategic ratio of only two to one.²¹

The irrefutable lesson that emerges from the Soviet invasion of Czechoslovakia is that strategic and operational surprise are achievable in contemporary times. Surprise was achieved for a variety of reasons. First, the capabilities of the satellite armies under the Soviet Union's leadership were much greater than were envisioned by western preinvasion estimates. Secondly, the Soviet Union skillfully created the preinvasion impression that it endorsed

the broad lines of policy adopted by the reformist leadership of Alexander Dubcek, First Secretary of the Czechoslovak Communist Party. In so doing the Soviet Union desensitized the west to the possibility of overt Soviet action to redress the political liberalization of Czechoslovakia. Lastly, surprise was achieved because preparation for the invasion which included limited mobilizations, massive troop movements, and significant stockpiling of fuel and supplies, seemingly went unnoticed.

AFGHANISTAN

The events leading to the occupation of Czechoslovakia in 1968 were in large measure replicated in the winter of 1979 as the Soviet Union invaded Afghanistan in order to suppress a recalcitrant population and ensure continued Soviet hegemony in the strategically important area of Central Asia. In a swift five-hour operation, elements of the Soviet elite 105th Airborne Division secured Kabul airport. This action was preliminary to the subsequent commitment of the remainder of the 105th, the 103d, and the 104th Airborne Divisions.²² Three days after the initial commitment of forces, the 105th Airborne Division, equipped with BMD armored assault vehicles, moved into the city of Kabul to seize key facilities, isolate the government, and neutralize Afghan army resistance.²³ As the 105th moved into Kabul, four motorized divisions supported by several squadrons of MIG21 Fishbeds and MIG23 Floggers advanced from the Soviet Union into Afghanistan on multiple axes.²⁴ By mid-April Afghan Army resistance was fully contained and control of the major populated areas of Afghanistan was firmly established.

As had been the case in Czechoslovakia, the success of the Soviet invasion was contingent upon speed of movement, shock, and surprise. Effective

resistance by the Afghan Army was preempted by the combination of a rapid advance by numerically superior formations and a ruse perpetrated by Soviet advisers which resulted in the recall for maintenance modifications of the preponderance of Afghan armor prior to the invasion.²⁵

As had been the case in Manchuria and Czechoslovakia, the Soviet invasion of Afghanistan was characterized by a series of forceful and unanticipated thrusts that radically altered the correlation of forces and enabled the Soviet Union to achieve rapid and decisive results. Fundamental to the Soviet success in each case was the ability to achieve surprise. These successes have shaped contemporary Soviet notions about surprise.

THE SOVIET CONCEPT OF SURPRISE

Writing in Military Review in 1982, Jennie A. Stevens, an expert in Soviet/Warsaw Pact ground force capabilities, suggests that the Soviet concept of surprise is much broader and much more complex than that espoused by other contemporary armies.²⁶ She seems to have captured the essence of the Soviet notion of surprise by describing it as an action or series of actions which are sudden in occurrence, forceful in thrust, completely unanticipated, and decisive.²⁷ This notion is consistent with the more detailed explanation offered by the Soviet Military Encyclopedia which maintains that surprise enables the attacker to strike the enemy in the time, place, and manner for which he is least prepared.²⁸ The Soviet Military Encyclopedia also maintains that surprise is achieved by confusing the enemy as to your intentions, by concealing your preparations, by applying new means and methods of attack, by correctly choosing the direction of the attack and the time for its initiation, and by rapid and decisive maneuver.²⁹

It is noteworthy that the Soviets make a conceptual distinction in the nature of surprise as a function of the level at which it is applied. In its broadest application, surprise has a strategic dimension. Strategic surprise, as described by C. J. Dick in a 1986 article appearing in the International Defense Review, stems from the concealment of the intention to launch an offensive and the timing of its initiation.³⁰ Strategic surprise is, in the Soviet view, commonly but not exclusively undertaken as the first decisive action in a large-scale military campaign against an unsuspecting enemy. It is normally achieved through large-scale deception actions, concealment of troop movements and concentrations, and diplomatic misinformation.

In a more limited application, surprise is achieved within an operational context. Operational surprise has been described by Major General Matsulenko, a noted authority on the Soviet use of surprise in World War II, as stemming from successful concealment of the timing, strength, direction, and mode of the attack.³¹

Operational surprise is more easily achieved if it is preceded by strategic surprise. However, it can be achieved in its own right, according to Major General S. P. Solov'ev, a contemporary Soviet military theorist and historian.³² Citing the 1945 invasion of Manchuria, he points out that the Soviets achieved a major victory while enjoying only a 1.2:1 superiority in men. This, he contends, validates the notion that operational surprise can be achieved by foregoing detailed preparations and attacking without the benefit of mobilization.³³ Again drawing upon the Manchurian campaign, he cites the Soviet decisions to attack in adverse weather and through the "impassable" terrain of the Grand Khingan Mountains as evidence that operational surprise can be achieved by attacking at an unlikely time and along unexpected axes.³⁴ Citing

the imaginative use of forward detachments equipped with improved T-34 tanks, Solov'ev also maintains that the introduction of unexpected operational methods and the unexpected employment of new or greatly improved weapons can contribute to operational surprise.³⁵ Lastly, Solov'ev argues that strict security and deception are fundamental prerequisites to the achievement of operational surprise.³⁶

The Soviets also recognize that surprise can be achieved in the tactical realm. The tactical application of surprise encompasses a broad range of activities, many of which differ from those of operational surprise only as a matter of scale. These include, but certainly are not limited to, concealment of attack positions, attacking at an unexpected time and place, denial and deception of enemy reconnaissance, and the unexpected application of fires of all types.

Lastly, the Soviets recognize that there is a psychological component of surprise. They believe that this is the dimension of surprise that induces fear, confusion and panic, and contributes to the paralysis of the enemy's will to mount organized resistance.

The sophisticated concept of surprise described above is seen by the Soviets as providing the conceptual framework within which offensive operations are conducted to achieve decisive and rapid results. This concept is translated to the battlefield in the form of a series of offensively oriented, surreptitious actions designed to confer upon the attacker a broad range of advantages.

ADVANTAGES OF SURPRISE

A review of contemporary Soviet military literature suggests that the traditional Soviet emphasis on surprise has not diminished. In fact, the literature suggests that the Soviets believe that the advent of nuclear weapons, the improved range and lethality of conventional weapons, the greater mobility and armored protection of ground formations, and the growth of combat aviation have substantially increased the role and significance of surprise strikes. In the Soviet view, particularly as it relates to a Warsaw Pact offensive in Western Europe, surprise is seen to confer a number of advantages. It is thought that surprise will produce conditions which will eliminate the need for a massive superiority in numbers and for large and vulnerable concentrations. Given a measure of strategic surprise, the Soviets believe that it is possible to preempt and render largely unworkable NATO's reinforcement plans.³⁷ Further, they believe that NATO's peacetime mal-deployment of forces may make it possible to preempt entirely or in part the establishment of a strong, coherent defense organized in depth. Certainly, surprise will preempt in very large measure the implementation of NATO's extensive obstacle and field fortification plan. The combination of these impacts will, in the Soviet view, largely obviate the need for Soviet forces to conduct difficult and costly breakthrough operations of prepared defenses. By so doing it will enable the Soviets to confront NATO formations in a series of meeting engagements as NATO units move to occupy their forward defenses. The Soviets will thus be able to impose a fluid and opportunistic style of warfare -- a mode of combat that they are organized and trained to conduct.³⁸

By obviating the need to conduct costly breakthrough operations, surprise reduces the requirement for strong subsequent echelons. This enables the Soviets to dispense with a strong second operational echelon which they believe to be vulnerable to both nuclear and conventional interdiction. The elimination of the need for a strong second operational echelon also serves to preempt NATO's "deep attack" strategems and as a result degrades NATO's ability to influence the introduction of Soviet formations into the "close battle."

In the preemption of prepared defenses, surprise is also thought to create the conditions in which a high rate of advance becomes possible and operational pauses become less likely. This in turn makes it possible to achieve limited strategic objectives much more rapidly and with fewer forces than would be required if the attack was conducted against prepared defenses.³⁹

By creating the conditions for a fluid war of meeting engagements and by enabling the Soviets to quickly carry the battle into the enemy's depth, surprise lessens the Soviet logistic burden and reduces the number of casualties suffered in the conduct of offensive operations.⁴⁰ Surprise is also thought to create conditions that make it easier to insert forces into the enemy rear.⁴¹ Certainly this is true with regard to the early introduction of operational maneuver groups (OMGs). OMGs can be committed earlier and to greater effect if their commitment is not contingent upon the requirement for first echelon forces to effect the requisite penetration. Lastly, the Soviets believe that surprise makes it possible to preempt NATO's employment of nuclear weapons.⁴² This they believe can be accomplished by means of a multi-staged, sequential air offensive designed to strike at NATO's main air bases, C² infrastructure, and ground-based nuclear assets before nuclear warheads and delivery means are dispersed.

SURPRISE AND OPERATIONAL WARFARE

Because of the advantages that it confers upon the attacker, surprise has become a principal component of the Soviet concept for operational warfare. Writing in International Defense Review in 1986, C. J. Dick suggests that the Soviets identify five essentials for a quick victory. These are surprise, a heavy blow, a rapid advance, simultaneous attacks throughout the enemy's depth, and air superiority.⁴³ In the Soviet view, surprise must be effectively and creatively coordinated with the other elements of the Soviet concept for operational warfare. By coordinating the application of surprise with the other elements of the Soviet concept of operational warfare the Soviets believe that initiative is conferred upon the attacker and a timely and effective enemy reaction is precluded. Further, the Soviets believe that the active combination of these principles makes surprise more attainable and the effect of surprise greater and longer lasting.

SURPRISE ON THE CONTEMPORARY BATTLEFIELD

Major General F. W. Von Mellethin, a former member of the German General Staff and a participant in many of the major armored clashes of World War II, suggests in his book, NATO Under Attack, that intelligence means have made it unlikely that a Warsaw Pact offensive in Central Europe could achieve strategic surprise.⁴⁴ However, he cautions that history is replete with examples of successful surprise attacks achieved under equally difficult circumstances through secrecy, deception, and the shuttered mind-set of the defender.⁴⁵ Recent historical examples, some of which have been examined in this paper, suggest that the Soviet skill in achieving surprise in World War II has not been

lost. Thus far in the post-war era, the Soviets have achieved surprise in Czechoslovakia in 1968, in Afghanistan in 1979, and in Poland in 1981. In the 1973 Arab-Israeli War, Soviet-backed Egyptian forces achieved strategic and operational surprise in the execution of an imaginatively conceived and skillfully executed assault across the Suez Canal. The lesson of these and other examples is that strategic and operational surprise remains achievable on the contemporary battlefield.

The Soviets recognize, however, that surprise may be more difficult to achieve in contemporary times as a result of advanced sensor technology, increasingly sophisticated electromagnetic surveillance and the creation of all-source intelligence fusion centers. Nonetheless, they believe that modern means of surveillance do not make surprise impossible to achieve. They recognize that if they elect to pursue a limited strategic objective, utilizing only forces in place, they will be able to reduce the scale and signature of required preparations. In so doing, they believe that it is possible to create sufficient doubt as to Warsaw Pact intentions so as to delay NATO's decision to implement countermeasures.⁴⁶ They also recognize that surprise does not have to be total to impart a substantial advantage.⁴⁷ Moreover, they believe that in some respects, technological advances have made surprise easier to achieve. They point out for example, that the increased range of modern missiles and aircraft have made it possible to deliver a massive, deep, and accurate blow without warning. They also are quick to emphasize that the great mobility of motorized and mechanized formations have made surprise more achievable by reducing the time required to move from garrison locations to attack positions.⁴⁸

Though the Soviets believe that it is possible to achieve surprise, they also believe that it is almost impossible to accomplish ad hoc surprise. They believe that surprise can only be achieved by detailed planning and purposeful, creative, and timely implementation. Further, they believe that planning for surprise must be based on thorough intelligence of the enemy and must take into full account his strengths and weaknesses and the nature of his deployments.

IMPLICATIONS OF THE SOVIET EMPHASIS ON SURPRISE

Soviet military historians and theorists have closely examined what they refer to as the "initial" or "beginning period of war." They consider this period to be between the outbreak of hostilities and the completion of preliminary mobilizations and forward deployments. The historical precedents most frequently examined have been the German invasion of France in 1940, the German invasion of the Soviet Union in 1941, and the Soviet invasion of Manchuria in 1945.

These experiences have led the Soviets to several conclusions regarding successful combat in the "beginning period of war." First, they have concluded that dramatic successes during this period of war can result in the swift disintegration of organized resistance and early victory.⁴⁹ Secondly, they believe that the nations that succeed in the "beginning period of war" are those that quickly bring overwhelming force to bear on the enemy. They also believe that the effectiveness of such a force is magnified, if by having achieved surprise, the enemy is denied adequate time to fully prepare his defenses. Further, they believe that maximum force can best be projected by applying it across a broad front in a single operational echelon. Lastly, the Soviets have concluded that the most effective way of initiating operations in the "beginning

period of war" is to commit, at every level, tank-heavy, task-organized forward detachments. These, in the Soviet view, should be committed on multiple axes prior to or simultaneous with the commitment of main force units.⁵⁰ They also believe that tank-heavy, task-organized operational maneuver groups, operating from the first echelon, are the best means for converting the tactical successes of the forward detachments into operational exploitations.

This view of the "initial period of war" has caused the Soviets to structure their forces for a high-intensity war of short duration. As a result, the Soviets have, since the mid-1960s, sought to build a forward offensive capability. More specifically, Soviet efforts have focused on achieving a short-warning attack capability that reduces their reliance on early reinforcement from the Western military districts of the Soviet Union. These efforts have taken the form of added force structure and improved armaments in the Group of Soviet Forces in Germany (GSFG). In the past decade, divisions of the GSFG have become more numerous; have been organized with increased numbers of advanced weapons; and have been maintained at increased levels of readiness.⁵¹ The expansion of the GSFG in the last decade is most clearly evidenced by increases of ten percent in tanks, twenty percent in personnel carriers and fighting vehicles, thirty-five percent in artillery, and over fifty percent in attack helicopters.⁵²

Quantitative increases in force structure have been accompanied by qualitative improvements in weapon systems. In order to achieve and sustain the rapid advance rates necessary to preempt NATO's defenses, the Soviets have concentrated on the development and fielding of improved systems to exploit a high-speed attack. These systems include infantry combat vehicles,

self-propelled artillery, more capable tactical aviation, improved helicopter gunships, and increasingly sophisticated air defense systems.

The steady quantitative growth and qualitative improvement of the GSFG are convincing indicators that the Soviets are earnest in their efforts to achieve a short-warning attack capability. These, however, are not the only indicators. Concomitant to implementing changes in force structure and organization, the Soviets have also implemented new operational procedures and concepts. In an effort to enhance their capability to conduct high-tempo combat operations, the Soviets have developed more rapid and flexible command and control procedures. These procedures have focused principally on improving the Soviet ability to commit first-echelon follow-on forces and to shift combat effort from one axis to another.

In an effort to wed capability with doctrine, the Soviets have also developed new operational concepts. These concepts are founded on the Soviet belief that they will be able to achieve a measure of strategic and operational surprise and that their attack will be initiated before the NATO defense is fully established. The Soviets believe that the operational problem, therefore, is less one of creating gaps in the defense than of exploiting gaps where a continuous front does not exist. The solution to this problem, in the Soviet mind, resides in the formation and employment of the operational maneuver group (OMG).

The OMG is a highly mobile, combined arms formation intended to operate ahead of Warsaw Pact main forces. It is envisioned that the OMG would be committed into the enemy's rear through an existing gap or one created by first-echelon forces. Once in the rear, the OMG would move rapidly to objectives located up to 300 kilometers deep.⁵³ These objectives could include

important bridges, transportation networks, airfields, command and control centers, and key logistic activities. The seizure of these types of objectives, combined with the presence of the OMG in the enemy's rear, would serve to disrupt his command and control, hinder his resupply operations, and complicate his commitment of his reserves.

The cumulative effect of the OMG would be to transfer the locus of the decisive battle from the forward defense area to the enemy's rear. Ultimate strategic success, which the Soviets regard as the elimination of the enemy's ability to continue armed resistance, would be achieved by second-echelon forces building on the operational success of multiple OMG operations.⁵⁴ Complementing the actions of operational maneuver groups, the Soviets have also developed operational doctrine for the employment of airborne and air assault forces. By Soviet doctrine, the introduction of airborne and air assault forces is undertaken to support the timed application of ground combat power. In broad terms, it is envisioned that helicopter-delivered air assault forces will operate in coordination with forward detachments of first echelon forces, while aircraft-delivered airborne forces conduct operations in support of operational maneuver groups. The development of a capability rapidly to insert large and well-equipped formations deep in the enemy's rear is further evidence of the Soviet desire to carry the attack rapidly and successfully to the operational depths in the "initial period of the war."

It is the view of many military observers that the Soviets have, in the 1980s, wedded concept and capability to achieve the capacity to launch a short-warning attack.⁵⁵ Because of quantitative and qualitative improvements in all combat arms and significantly increased unit readiness, there is a growing concern that the Warsaw Pact no longer requires the time traditionally

associated with extended mobilization and reinforcement in order to launch an attack that preempts NATO's defenses. The existence of a credible, short-warning attack capability by the Soviet Union has major implications for the NATO defense of Central Europe. Clearly, this capability threatens to reduce NATO's strategic and operational warning time. This in turn has implications for NATO's ability to mobilize, deploy forces forward, and prepare defenses.

IMPLICATIONS FOR THE NATO DEFENSE OF EUROPE

Soviet operational strategy in Central Europe has taken on a more recognizable form in recent years. The Soviet aim appears to be to quickly seize territory in West Germany by conventional means and in so doing present to NATO an irrevocable "fait accompli" that alters the balance of power in Europe in the Soviet favor. The evidence seems to suggest that the Soviets will seek to preempt NATO's forward defense by attacking without mobilization or reinforcement. The evidence also suggests that the Soviets, by means of a rapid advance into NATO's operational and strategic depths, will seek to forestall mobilization, prevent reinforcement, and bring about NATO's early military and political collapse.

It is also becoming clear that Soviet military planners increasingly favor an offensive conducted on multiple axes across a broad front. Such an offensive, in the Soviet view, would magnify the impact of strategic surprise by concealing their main axis of advance and by presenting NATO with multiple threats. It is likely that the Soviets would also seek to extend the effects of surprise by attacking in a single operational echelon and by inserting OMGs, airborne forces, and air assault units into the enemy's rear at the earliest

opportunity. By bringing about an early collapse of the defense and by preventing its reestablishment, the Soviets would also hope to preclude NATO, with its slow and cumbersome nuclear release procedures, from attempting to restore the situation by introducing nuclear weapons.

The aspect of this strategy that poses the greatest threat to NATO is the Soviet intent to preempt forward defenses by means of a short-warning, unreinforced attack. Such an attack invalidates the assumption that NATO will have both the time and political will to mobilize in the face of indications that the Soviet Union is preparing for war. Unfortunately, most of NATO's defense planning is based on this assumption.

More importantly, NATO's strategy of Forward Defense is inextricably linked to the requirement for adequate time for mobilization and reinforcement. With NATO's current active force structure, it has been estimated that it will take between forty-eight and ninety-six hours, after a decision to mobilize has been made, before NATO's principal combat formations and supporting elements have deployed from their peacetime locations to their defensive positions.⁵⁶ Though the structure of the Forward Defense is in place after ninety-six hours, much of the necessary defensive preparation remains to be accomplished. This includes the implementation of a comprehensive barrier plan, the call-up of reserves, the formation of territorial units for rear area security, the creation of an integrated infrastructure for logistic resupply, the reception of reinforcements, the enhancement of air defenses, and the establishment of operating bases for reinforcing air.

A Soviet short-warning, unreinforced attack has, therefore, major implications for the viability of the NATO strategy of Forward Defense. Such an attack would in all probability create conditions that would result in NATO

ground forces being brought to battle before they had an opportunity to mobilize fully and move forward to defensive positions along the frontier. A short-warning, unreinforced attack would, in all likelihood, find some NATO units forward deployed in their assigned defensive sectors, others in movement, and still others in various stages of mobilization. The lack of a cohesive defensive framework would create opportunities for fast moving Soviet formations to exploit gaps in the defense, isolate and envelop forward deployed units, and impose their style of warfare through a series of meeting engagements within the interior of West Germany. Confronted with multiple penetrations across a broad front, it is further possible that NATO would dissipate reinforcements in piecemeal commitment to shore up collapsing forward defenses. In sum, by attacking without warning and unreinforced, the Soviets create conditions that negate the inherent advantages that accrue to the defender by preempting NATO's efforts to establish and reinforce a forward defense on favorable terrain. Further, they are able to impose a far-ranging, fluid, and opportunistic style of combat which takes full advantage of their organizational strengths and capabilities. These include a powerful air arm that is oriented on close support for ground forces, sophisticated and plentiful air defense systems and strong airborne and air assault capabilities.

A Soviet short-warning, unreinforced attack not only denies to NATO the time to complete mobilization and reinforcement, it also exploits other fundamental NATO vulnerabilities. A principal NATO vulnerability is a lack of operational depth in the Central Region. This is evidenced by the fact that the Rhine River, the first objective of strategic consequence, lies a distance of only 150-350 kilometers from the Inter-German Border (IGB). More critically, the Ruhr, the industrial heartland of West Germany, is only 300 kilometers

across the North German Plain from the IGB. The shallow depth of NATO's operational area limits its ability to conduct a successive defense in depth. From the Soviet perspective, NATO's lack of depth makes it possible to achieve strategic aims by means of a single operational campaign that is executed during the "initial period of war" without mobilization or reinforcement.

NATO is also vulnerable as a result of the peacetime mal-deployment of its forces. Many NATO forces, especially those defending in the North German Plain, are garrisoned significant distances from their wartime positions and require considerable warning time to complete mobilization and forward movement.⁵⁷ Moreover, the best equipped and most capable NATO forces are generally deployed in southern Germany. These forces are poorly positioned with respect to the North German Plain, considered by many Western analysts to be the principal invasion route for a Soviet thrust into Central Europe. In the Soviet view, the success of NATO forces defending the southern approaches, i.e., the Fulda Gap, the Hof Corridor, and the Cheb Approach, would not prevent the rapid seizure of the heavily populated Ruhr region and hence the achievement of a major strategic objective. In other words, failure in the north makes largely irrelevant successes in the south.

A short-warning, unreinforced Soviet attack also exploits NATO's lack of in-place strategic reserves. The absence of in-place strategic reserves is made all the more significant by the fact that NATO requires four to nine days to build up even fairly small operational reserves.

The last major vulnerability that a Soviet short-warning, unreinforced attack exploits is the alliance itself. The defense of Central Europe is entrusted to forces of seven nations with different and divergent interests. The political cohesion of the Alliance may depend on the ability of NATO's

ground forces to conduct a successful defense close to the frontiers. The preemption of such a defense would have political implications that might prove divisive. Moreover, the diversity in equipment, language, tactical and operational doctrine, staff procedures, and logistic systems pose problems for the prosecution of coalition warfare that require time to resolve. As important, the Alliance requires time to determine the intent and magnitude of Soviet aggression and to consider its nuclear options. By compelling an early decision, a short-warning, unreinforced Soviet attack strikes at the very fabric of the Alliance. It may also contribute to an erosion of Western political resolve and induce a climate of collapse.

CONCLUSIONS

The Soviets recognize that it is clearly in their interest to achieve a rapid decision in any future European conflict. Based on historical precedents, they believe that a rapid and decisive victory can best be achieved during the "initial period of war." As a result, Soviet planners have increasingly favored a short-warning, unreinforced attack that denies NATO the warning time that it requires to establish a viable, cohesive, and continuous forward defense.

Accordingly, the Soviets have altered their force structure and doctrine to provide the capability to conduct such an attack. Their untiring efforts in the last decade have resulted in a credible capability to strike NATO throughout the depth of its defenses without either mobilization or reinforcement. Having successfully meshed an increased force structure with an improved doctrine, the Soviets now have an in-place short-warning attack capability. This capability is evidenced in the Soviet capacity to deliver massive strikes into NATO's rear area by means of a large, sophisticated and imposing air arm. Further, the

Soviets are able to attack NATO's strategic and operational depths with airborne formations and air assault forces that have substantially improved mobility, firepower, and armored protection. Lastly, the Soviets have the capability to strike NATO across a broad front along multiple axes with well-equipped and plentiful mechanized forces that are trained and organized to conduct offensively oriented combat operations on a fluid, non-linear, and extended battlefield.

Based on an assessment of their capabilities and NATO's vulnerabilities, the Soviets also believe that the current NATO situation offers the potential for the achievement of strategic success by means of a single operational campaign employing multiple fronts and OMGs. A strategy that provides for a surprise attack that offers the potential for success in a single operational campaign is especially attractive to Soviet planners since it is grounded in historical experience, takes full advantage of Soviet military strengths and capabilities, and exploits NATO vulnerabilities.

NATO, for its part, must reconcile a politically imposed strategy of Forward Defense with the operational problems posed by a Soviet surprise attack. If the historical precedents have validity, then it is likely that a Soviet attack in Central Europe will achieve, in some degree, both strategic and operational surprise. If such is the case, then it is also likely that NATO will have little opportunity to prepare defenses or to augment force levels prior to hostilities.

As reinforcement is generally regarded as a prerequisite to the success of the NATO strategy of Forward Defense, a Soviet surprise attack that preempts reinforcement represents the most dangerous threat to NATO. As the most dangerous and likely threat, it must be accorded first priority in NATO's

planning efforts. Therefore, current and projected NATO initiatives must be directed toward enhancing the NATO capability to both deter and defeat such an attack. NATO's current interest in developing means to interdict strategic follow-on echelons moving forward from the Soviet Union, though important, must take a lower priority. As was so eloquently expressed by the collective voice of a group of concerned officers writing in a recent professional publication,

we must take great care not to incur a strategic deficit by building for the desirable at the expense of the essential.⁵⁸

Many measures could be implemented to improve NATO's ability to defend against a Soviet short-warning, unreinforced attack in Central Europe. The most obvious measure would be to increase the size of NATO's conventional forces in Central Europe. This would redress the imbalance created by the Soviet build-up of the GSFG in the last decade and would provide for conventional forces in sufficient strength to deter the Soviets from attempting an unreinforced attack. An increase in NATO conventional formations would compel the Soviets to mobilize and reinforce prior to initiating hostilities; actions that NATO could recognize far enough in advance to permit countermobilization and reinforcement and more importantly, to preclude surprise.

One useful measure which would lessen the impact of a short-warning, unreinforced attack would be the construction of permanently manned field fortifications along the IGB. An extensive, permanently emplaced and manned barrier system would act as a force multiplier for defending forces and would largely negate the advantage that surprise confers upon the attacker. Confronted with a formidable barrier trace, the Soviets would be forced to echelon their forces to ensure penetration. To do so they would either have to

mobilize additional forces, which would prejudice surprise, or they would have to attack on a narrower front and accept the possibility of fewer penetrations. In either case, NATO's task would be greatly simplified and the prospects for suitable "deep attack" targets substantially increased. The merit of such an initiative is further increased by the fact that it is unambiguously defensive and as such is not destabilizing.

Another measure that would substantially improve NATO's ability to defend against a surprise attack would be to increase the number and combat power of units in place on the IGB. Such a force, particularly if it was in place behind an extensive barrier network, would be able to identify the principal axes of a Soviet attack, disrupt the integrity of attacking formations, slow the momentum of the advance, and provide sufficient time to enable NATO's main ground forces to fight their initial battle as far forward as possible.

NATO could also increase the size of operational reserves in order to have a greater capability to respond to the Soviet main effort, to seal off and defeat OMGs and to counterattack when opportunities presented themselves. The constitution of additional reserves from assets currently in-place could be accomplished by a greater economy of force made possible by the emplacement of permanent barriers.

Lastly, NATO could improve its ability to defend against a short-warning, unreinforced attack by the implementation of a broad range of readiness initiatives. These include, but are certainly not limited to, improving survivability of air bases, C³ activities, logistic complexes, and air defense sites; increasing peacetime manning rates; greater emphasis and support of maintenance activities; increased levels of in theater ammunition stocks; and the selective repositioning of mal-deployed combat units.

As it is in the Soviet interest, so also is it in NATO's interest, to terminate the war quickly. To do so, NATO must compel the Politbureau to make a rapid decision either to negotiate or escalate. To create the conditions for such a decision, NATO must confront the Politbureau with operational failure that has been achieved by the rapid defeat of the committed forces of the Warsaw Pact. This mandates that NATO have the capability to deter, and if deterrence fails, to defeat a short-warning, unreinforced Soviet attack.

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